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On the Representative Art of the Nivkhi and Ainu
[Ob Izobrazitel'nom Iskusstve Nivkhov i Ainov]

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[Title page]

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The exceptional ornamental richness of the representative art of the peoples inhabiting the basin of the Amur river and Sakhalin Island, the variety and perfection of their traditional methods of artistic workmanship in wood, birch-bark, bone, fish skins, furs and threads have, on innumerable occasions, attracted the attention of students of Siberia and the Far East. Unified in their general features while infinitely varied in the execution of details, the arts of the Nanai (Goldi), the Nivkhi (Gilyak), the Ulchi, the Orochi, the Ainu, and of other peoples are distinguished by the perfection of method and the stability of form, which bear witness to the continuity of the representative themes and the ornamental motives that provide the basis for the decorative compositions. Description and representation of ornamentation in the dress, household utensils, boats, houses, and grave monuments are to be found in the works of Schrenk (1) Laufer, Shternberg, (2) Lopatin, (3) and also the investigations

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1. L. Schrenk. Die Völker des Amur-Landes, St. Petersburg, 1903.

2. L. Y. Shternberg, Aĭnskaîa Problema (The Ainu Problem). Sbornik Muzeîa Antropologii i Etnografii, Vol. VIII, 1929.

3. I. Lopatin. Goldy, Vladivostok, 1922.

by Ivanov (4) of the religious and secular plastic art and orna-

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4. S.S.V. Ivanov. Ornamentika i obriady, svîazannye s Amurskoĭ lodkoĭ (The Ornamentation and Ritual connected with the Amur Boat).

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Sovetskaia Etnografiia, 1935, No. 4-5; Medved' v iskusstve narodnostei Amura (The Bear in the Art of the Amur Peoples). Sbornik V.G. Bogoras, 1937.

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mentation of the Amur peoples. Thanks to the work of the above mentioned authors one can form a fairly accurate idea about the stylistic and thematic originality of this remarkable centre of popular decorative art, which forms a link in the chain that extends from the south to the north-east of the Pacific ocean and which, in the past, may have connected the neolithic cultures of Asia with the ancient peoples of the extreme end of the north-east and north-west of America. If there are still many unclear and debatable links in that chain, one may hope, that the increasing scope of work of the North-eastern Expedition of the Amur Peoples of the USSR will help to untie the complex knot of ethnic and historical relationships in the Amur basin and on the North-eastern shore of the Pacific Ocean. Having been twice a participant in the work of the expedition - on the Chikotka in 1945 and in the Lower reaches of the Amur and in the South Sakhalin in 1947--and as a member of the Institute of Art Industries I had the task of investigating the forgotten and the presently existing artistic crafts and of taking measures for their re-juvenation and development. At the same time, I /33/ studied the problems of style, genesis, development and of the spread of the ornamental forms.

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The Amur-Sakhalin expedition collected a considerable amount of material dealing with the representative art of the Nanai, the Ulchi, the Nivkhi, the Orochi and the Ainu peoples. In the present report I will describe only some typical forms of the Nivkhi and the Ainu ornamentation and of their religious and secular sculpture, in order to throw a new light on the questions of the origin of the "Gilyak Bear Vessels," and on the band and string ornamentation in the Ainu Bear sculpture.

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825 In the ancestral bear barns of the My and Uarki settlements we had an opportunity to look over and in part to draw and photograph up to 40 whole specimens and fragments of specimens of the ornamented "bear ladles"—nikhyr. All the ladles may be divided into two groups in accordance with the symbolic representations on their handles:

1) Ladles with the representation of a bear sitting on his hind legs (in rare cases, two bears) with a noose over his neck. A crossbar frequently connects the noose with the handle. The bear's nuzzle lies on the edge of the vessel. In some samples of this group the hind part of the bear is twisted in the form of a spiral. (Drawings 1 and 2)

2) Ladles representing a bear (in rare cases, two bears) standing between two pillars. The crossbar connecting the pillars is continued to the end until its connection with the dipper, and, together with the base on which the figure stands, forms a long continuous frame of the carved handle. In the centre of the frame,-in the rectangle formed by the pillars, is the bear with his muzzle turned toward the vessel. (drawing 1, a). In the ladles of the first and second group the edge of the handle opposite to the dipper usually ends in a twirl or a circlet with a protrusion in the shape of a spear or "a goose."

According to the explanations given by our informants, the ladles of the first group were prepared "when the bear was killed in the hunt." The hind part, twisted into a spiral, represents not the bear itself, but only its skin: "from the forest the head and skin of the bear was carried home on a belt." The representations of the second group have reference to a bear fed within a settlement and killed on a holiday. On the whole, the workmanship of the ladles we have seen is primitive, but the carving, and especially the representation of bears is very expressive. The bear sculpture contains rich potentialities for the development of the realistic (animalistic) art. Individual bear ladles are more than one metre in length. Some of them contain pictographic carvings. One's attention is drawn to the generally birdlike shape of /34/ the ladles. In this connection

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532 it is interesting to compare the shape of the bear vessels with
825 the ritual vessels, used by the Nivkhi for "feeding the sea." The latter type (which in our opinion, is more archaic) in the main also consists of vessels in the shape of a bird, sometimes complicated by symbolic decoration (vessels with two bird heads with long interwoven necks, etc.).

A The expedition also gathered valuable, and by now
172 "archeologic" in their origin, collections of the items of the
532 Ainu art: The compulsory Japanization of the Ainu shows it-
825 self strikingly in the loss by this people of their own national
[177] culture, so that we did not find anything characteristically Ainu in their homes, dresses, and household utensils. It was only in the neighborhood of the Ainu settlements, at the old worship places--inau-kah--that we found ancient Ainu utensils and objects used in religious ceremonies and that had been preserved in these places since the time when the Ainu celebrated the bear festival. Especially interesting findings were made by us near the settlements of Niita and Sirokhan. Of greatest interest among these findings are the sculptured representations of bears, bears' heads and especially snake-like representations with the head of the bear all dug out from under the roots of trees, together with hard-to-recognize, twisted and interwoven pieces of roots also ending in bears' heads. The figures found were apparently wrapped up in pieces of bear fur and tied up with strings of bast. /The remainder of this article is in the Ainu Files only/. This is evidenced by bits of hair adhering to representations and by soft lumps of the remnants of string, in which the dug out

A figures lay. Some of the samples have fully preserved their
[115] dress (drawing 3, a). Our informer Sirokava (a 65 year old
[224] Ainu from the Sirokam settlement) told us that similar representations were kept in every Ainu home, and that after a successful hunt a new string was tied up to the bear's figure.

A /35 contains photographs./ /36/
532 All the representations are made of the larch roots, and
825 the craftsmen seem to have intentionally used various twist and

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532 825 interweavings of roots for an unknown set purpose. Only in relation to the representation of the head, the carvers exhibit a definite intention and great mastery in rendering the full likeness, and together with it a monumental generalization of the real appearance of a bear.

The collection of representations gathered by us (about 60 in number) can be divided into four groups:

1) Separate, realistically rendered bear heads (Drawing 3, b).

2) The most numerous representations, which render the general appearance of a bear (Drawing 3, v). The representations are all twisted in form: many of them either lack legs, or have the legs twisted in a grotesque way; others lack bodies so that the legs are connected directly with the head. In the same group may be included one paired representation of the bears sitting on their hind legs, with some incomprehensible additions made possibly for greater stability. (Drawing 3, g).

3) A Small group of sculptural combinations representing heads and legs (Drawing 3, d)

4) A representation in the shape of a bear's head with several quaintly shaped representations made of interweaving roots. Among the latter is a piece of root with a tied up knot with separated edges carved up into heads. (Drawing 3, e, zh, z)

192 532 825 Sinokava gave all these representations the name of inoka. L. Y. Shternberg translates this Ainu word as snake, inoka-kamui meaning a divine snake. Inasmuch as among the inokas the representations of bears still prevail, one may suppose that the name "snake" was transferred by the Ainus to the wooden image of a bear. This hypothesis is in accord with the grotesque form of the "bears," which seem to have still preserved some [171] of the appearance and attributes of the snakes. Evidently, in these inokas are combined the northern cult of the bear practices throughout Siberia with the cult of the snake brought by the 532 825 Ainu from the south. (5) As of greater practical significance 178

5. See L.Y. Shternberg. [113] Aĭnskaĭa Problema (The Ainu

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problem). Sbornik, Khavarovsk, 1933, p. 571

under the conditions of life on Sakhalin island, the cult of the bear seems to prevail in these representations over the half-forgotten by the Ainu myth of the "divine snake."

Freed by the passage of time from the binding strings and the fur, the sculptural forms of the inoka are of exceptional interest, providing an opportunity of tracing the plastic metamorphosis of the mythical image of the snake into a realistic representation of the bear.

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Interesting samples for the comparison of the bear theme in the Nivkhi and Ainu carvings are provided by the ikunisi, the Ainu sticks--"usoderzhateli" (supporters). I shall first note an unusually great number of them, some 500 samples being known to us through the beautifully edited album and collections of the South-Sakhalin Museum. In the Ainu settlements we saw and in part acquired individual samples which have now become rarities. A distinguished craftsmanship in their execution, their richness of form, and a striking variety in their ornamentation made through the application of different methods of miniature-decorative carving, permit us to regard the ikunisi as real masterpieces of art.

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Worthy of note is the symbolic-pictographic carving of the ikunisi. The materials at our disposal show not only the themes resembling those known to us in the Nivkhi bear vessels, but also a variety of new compositions. /37/

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It is typical that on the ikunisi with the bear theme, the prevailing representations are not those of the entire figures of bears, but only their heads (one or several) generally placed in the string and band nooses which are interwoven (Drawings 4 and 5). On some of the sticks the interweaving was made not by carving but with real bast strings; on others the heads are shown on the right-angled platforms, and cups are placed before the bears' heads. It seems to us that these compositions with bears' heads present an early form of the bear cult (the

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532 worship of heads), practiced widely throughout Siberia, rather
825 than the locally limited and in its ideology more complex
171 "holiday of the bear" which is connected with the keeping of the bear in a wooden cage and with the ceremonial killing of the animal. If this hypothesis is correct, the bear themes on the Ainu sticks would seem to be more archaic in their content than the carving on the Nivkhi ladles.

532 The sculptured representation of a swallow (encountered
825 also on wooden scabbards) bound by a uniquely carved fence or ring, is no less a widespread theme of the ikunisi than that of the bear. (Drawing 6, b). Still more frequent are the representations of the swallow placed in string nooses and in the interweaving of bands (Drawing 6, a). In the variant of the latter type a bear's head is frequently represented with that of a swallow. The stability of this composition, and the well developed type of the fence-ring, as well as numerous variations with the string-band interweavings allow the inference that the origin of the swallow theme is independent of the analogous bear compositions. If that is so, one can hardly connect the origin of the string-band ornament with the bear theme alone. I may add here, that not only the swallow, but also the presence of the beaver and the seal in the ornamental interweavings on the ikunisi bear witness to a broader base of origin of the string and band motives.

532 Let us first attempt to discover the significance of the ikunisi. It is hardly probable that the original function of these sticks with the pictographic /38/ carving and symbolic ornamentation was to support one's moustache while drinking wine. Montandon (6) considers that the term "supporters" (usoderzhateli)

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6. G. Montandon, La civilisation Ainou. Paris, 1937.

used by the ethnographers describes the Ainu sticks only as objects of "contemporary toilet" of a person and does not

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532 explain their ritual significance. However, Montandon's calling them "sticks for libation" also does not reveal the original function of these mysterious objects.

532 224 211 171 It is interesting to compare the ikunisi with the pictographic drawings on wooden boards by the shore Chukchee and with the Eskimo carvings on objects made of bone. The Chukchee and the Eskimo use these objects - the former for the commemoration of the results of a successful hunt (representing the killed animals and the actual scenes from the hunt), the latter for "the invocation of the forces of Nature producing food." Were not the ikunisi also basically commemoration plaques on which were marked the number of animals killed in a hunt and the circumstances under which the killing was accomplished? It is typical that almost all "ikunisi" generally have simple notches (varying in number) cut in at the end of the sticks. Also encountered are sticks having only notches, with neither representations nor ornament on them.

532 In spite of the astonishing variety of the artistic variations, the Ainu ornamentation stubbornly preserves its original motives. The various phases of the artistic development of these motives help to trace out and discover their material and ideological base. The investigators who have studied the Ainu art have [114] various explanations of the content and origin of the Ainu ornamentation. In the works of Shurts, Laufer, Montandon, and especially in those of Shternberg one may come across interesting observations and hypotheses, although in some cases (Shurts and Montandon) these are not always well founded. Since in the present article I have no opportunity to analyse all the basic motives of the Ainu ornamentation described by these authors or discovered by us I shall dwell only on two, which in our opinion are most frequently encountered. Such basic motives are a string woven of bast or some other material and the twisting and interweaving snakes. (7) The motives developed on

[113] 7. The development of the form of the Ainu ornamentation from

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the snakes has been discovered and traced by L. Y. Shternberg, in Aĭnskaĭa problema (The Ainu Problem), Sbornik Muzeĭa Antropologii i Etnografii, Akademiia Nauk SSR, Vol. VIII, 1929.

these bases are so similar in their plastic qualities that one involuntarily wishes to recognize only one of the above mentioned bases as the original one and the motive connected with it as primary, and to call the other base a derivative from the first. However, a very essential difference in the bases themselves
[825] gives us no right to make such a generalization. The basis for the motive of the twisting and interweaving snakes is the religious concept of the divine essence of snakes, which is the imagination transformed reflection of the real struggle waged by men against snakes in southern latitudes. The string ornamentation develcped on the basis of practical activities of tying and untying. In the decorative compositions the two motives interpenetrate and, at times, are completely indistinguishable.

Varieties of interweaving, nooses, and skillfully tied knots of strings and bands (snakes) form the most widespread forms of the Ainu ornamentation. (Drawing 6, v, g, d). The string and band ornament is connected with the representations of animals, binding them with the surface of the decorated object. Breaking apart the ornament may get separated into a series of geometric figures or into a variety of curves.

532 /39/ The Ainu undoubtedly hold the first place among the
171 peoples of Siberia in the artistic quality of their miniature decorative carving. The masterly artistic execution of small surfaces of firm wood (far less frequently of bone and horn surfaces) is brought by the Ainu carvers to a point of virtuosity. The best illustration of this are the decorations on the ikunisi. The compositional variety of ornamental motives and of

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532 representative themes on these sticks, embodying not only
171 some decorative elements prevailing on the Sakhalin and the Amur, but also those typical of the art of the hunters of the Arctic, makes it reasonable to suppose that the Ainu artistic culture, serving as a focal point for the convergence of the ancient ornamental traditions of many peoples, is the oldest centre of ornamental art in the north-east of Asia. There is no doubt that this centre exerted an influence on the neighboring peoples, and through them on the more distant cultures.

000 [Because of technical problems, HRAF was unable to reproduce the illustrations in this source for the English translation. Therefore, the researcher will have to refer to the foreign text for the illustrations themselves. For the convenience of the researcher the captions of the illustrations have been translated and are given below. The figure numbers and page numbers refer to the foreign text in Category 116.]

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171 Figure 1, page 33. "Bear ladle" from the village My
532 (collected by the expedition).
825 Nivkhi, Amur estuary.

Figure 2, page 34. Fragment of a "bear ladle" representing the hide and head of a bear. From the village of My. Nivkhi, Amur estuary.

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172 Figure 3, page 35. Sculpture representations gathered
532 at ancient places of worship. From
825 the Ainu villages Nilta and Sirokham.

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532 Figure 4, page 37. Fragment of an Ainu stick ikunisi
825 representing a bear head.

Figure 5, page 37. Ainu stick ikunisi with carved bear

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heads, wound by cords made of bark.

Figure 6, page 39.

Ainu sticks ikunisi: a) high relief carving (swallow and bear head); b) high relief carving (swallow chasing a whale, and swallow in enclosure); v) stick wound with cords made of bark; g) and d) carving imitating intertwining of cord. Reproductions from various sources.